

British India, French India: Comparative Perspectives

15–16 September 2011, Centre Culturel de l'Entente Cordiale, Château d'Hardelot, France [Near Eurostar Calais-Fréthun]

The [Arts and Humanities Research Council](#)-funded project on 'Peripheral Voices and European Colonialism: Representations of India in French Literature and Culture 1750–1962' which started in Liverpool in 2006 has contributed towards francophone postcolonial studies, which, with areas such as gender studies, has been the most important transformative influence in whole discipline of French Studies in the UK and in the English-speaking world in the last thirty years. The Liverpool project was the first to analyse, from both a comparative and a postcolonial perspective, the representation of the five French trading posts on the subcontinent (Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Mahe, Yanam and Karikal), and the way that India is written about in French more generally.

Given that advances in postcolonial theory are frequently struggles between models — posited, nuanced, retrospectively revised, and then selectively discarded over time — the end-of-project conference in 2011 offers a chance to evaluate critically the usefulness of the writing about the French presence in India from 1754 to 1962. For example, how can using French minor colonizers in India to move away from the colonizer/colonized binary, help us to study agency and 'sub-imperial' power (W. Baumgart)? What can the atypical context of the transposed, subordinated and partially forgotten orientalisms of the French in India contribute to current debates about travelling cultures, transnationalism and 'mobility studies' (S. Greenblatt)?

Conscious that the venue is the [Centre Culturel de l'Entente cordiale](#), located in France, but facing Britain, historically, symbolically and literally, the conference will remain faithful to the aims of the AHRC project and continue to foster dialogue between all those who study India, be they French or English speakers. Our aim is to integrate comparatist perspectives without over diluting the historical and geographical specificity of the study of India. To that end, the organizers welcome 250-word proposals in French or English corresponding to the following four domains:

Bilateral contact between France and India in the context of British colonialism and World English

This strand will present critical approaches to the history of French institutions and individuals involved in trade with India. It will also critically evaluate French Indology and the promotion of French culture in India from the eighteenth century to the present day. Here is a non-exhaustive list of with examples of relevant institutions: the Compagnies des Indes, the Ecole française en Extrême Orient, the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, the Institut français de Pondichéry, the network of Alliances Françaises in India and the Centre de Sciences Humaines.

Postcolonialism and comparatism

Papers in this domain will interrogate the usefulness of Francophone Postcolonial Studies and the place of comparative approaches in postcolonial criticism and theory. Proposals addressing the contested place of *études postcoloniales* in France and allied theoretical interventions are welcome.

Case studies of French representations of India in both textual and non-textual media

Papers in this strand will cover cultural production which is both germane to and beyond the AHRC project. This includes analyses of French-language representations of India in literature, history, philosophy as well as those in film, fine art, fabric and architecture (Chandigarh, Auroville). [Hardelot-Plage](#) will host a public exhibition: 'De Bombay à Hardelot: 50 ans de présence de la famille Tata' running concurrently with the conference.

Bibliography and the digital humanities

French Books on India: from Dupleix to Decolonization is an online free-access bibliography with a critical apparatus. It will be available here before the conference: www.liv.ac.uk/frenchbooksonindia. This part of the conference will address the methodological issues surrounding multilingual bibliographies, canon formation in colonial and post-colonial literatures, as well as bibliography after Wikipedia.

Please send proposals to Ian Magedera (magedera@liv.ac.uk) by 14 July 2011. Twenty-minute papers can be given in English or in French.

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